
Occupy the National Dance Centre



Confused people, perpetual noise, general indecision, voices, music, steps, big ravaged rooms. In one of the corners, a saxophonist improvises on jazz while a kid is running around on all fours, babbling and playing with his mother. Some of the people are just watching the show, resigned, some are talking fervently, gesticulating, losing their temper every now and then. Others are painting and writing activist messages on the ground and on the walls. "Your last chance to dance...the dance of the revolution", "Don't stand still, occupy!", "It's not over yet". Others are still dancing, rehearsing for a performance, which they don't know if and when is going to take place. Others are doing physical exercise, interacting with the contents of the room - pieces of plastic, of dry cement, clothes, random objects. Outside, the sun is shining, the spring is calling them but they don't go unless they have another protest to make. They mostly stay inside, in this place which was their life for the past 5 years; willingly trapped in

here, creating, dancing and sharing these rather rough moments that were just described.

It used to look different. Over the the last five years it had been a creative, alternative place where beautiful people danced, acted and laughed at their own and our problems in the way that we, the Romanians, usually do - laugh at the government, laugh at the politics, at the ministers and laugh at our poverty and humility. And among all the very strict, institutionalized, old-fashioned theaters and art spaces this was one of the only alternative, innovative, modern and 'with a voice' performance venues in Romania; the only one which actually dealt only with contemporary dance with the quality of a public institution. Even as a public institution, financed with government funds, the people who were representing it were very free in expressing their general dissatisfaction concerning ministries, laws, politics, the overall situation and the way in which they were doing it was very incisive, straight, obvious and after all, courageous. Their name: The National Dance Centre - Bucharest.

Ever since its founding, it was financed by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and hosted on the last floor of the Romanian National Theatre building. The space was perfect for everything they needed, many rehearsal rooms, space for offices and a big hall where performances took place. After 4 years of activity, time in which they started to become well known, to have a number of people who were constantly attending their performances and events, to make their mark on the place in which they were working, the decision of the Ministry of Culture came down: the renovation of the National Theatre was scheduled to start in the spring of 2011 and this meant that by that date, the last floor had to be evacuated and moreover, that it would be demolished; so the National Dance Centre had to move with no other option of a place where they could carry on with their activities. They tried numerous times to make the authorities reconsider their choice as well as to find another place, but in the end nothing worked.

Under the circumstances, they came up with this idea: when the workers are deprived of their working space, it's their right to occupy it. So this is what they did. They decided not to leave the place anymore until somebody did something for them. This is why in these weeks while the place was occupied, there was always, at any time during night or day, something going on, as everybody there started to do what they are best at: dancers rehearsing or creating new pieces, artists painting or drawing on the walls, musicians playing, journalists writing. At first everything was perfect; people were swept up by the 'herd mentality' as it usually happens in the beginning - someone just said: 'let's occupy it!' and this

is what they did, they all agreed with no doubts. But then, the days passed by, the place started to get more and more dirty, some people became impatient, the general conditions got worse. So suddenly they realized they didn't have the same goal anymore. Some were asking themselves why it was necessary to occupy the place, some didn't agree with the way the occupation movement had evolved and many more disagreements which were not coming to any conclusion. In the end, after many days of creativity mixed with doubt, misery, protests, uncertainty, the occupy movement ended. They all went home, hoping that they would soon find a solution or that somebody else would find it for them.

Why didn't it work? I have often asked myself this question, after seeing their action and meeting some members of the group and I think the answer lies in the nature of contemporary man. Lately, in the era that we're living in, the emphasis is put much more on the individual than before. We're not used to thinking and acting as a unitary group or of being convinced by the group's ideologies and of taking them as our own. At first it often happens that people feel the same impulse and go for a moment in the same direction, but after a while they always start confronting their own interests with the ones of the group and realise that, actually, some things don't fit perfectly. Then, the projection of how things should be doesn't fit with the way things are in reality anymore. This is the point where conflicts appear. This is why the revolution in 1989 in Romania was so confusing and caused so many deaths and this is why some revolutions and revolts don't succeed: people want different things and they are not able to find common points anymore.

Listening to other people's needs, understanding, giving up your own strict ideas in order to meet with some else's ideas, sharing, communicating, these all are things that we less and less know how to do and yet, they are probably the key to effective creative activism.



Visuals by:

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